



News Release

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FIRE SAFETY TIPS FOR WINTER

State Fire Marshal Urges Louisiana Citizens to Practice Fire Safety This Winter

Baton Rouge -- The cold has come to Louisiana, and furnaces, heaters, fireplaces and woodstoves are in full use. State Fire Marshal V. J. Bella, in cooperation with the United States Fire Administration and the National Association of State Fire Marshals, urges citizens of the State of Louisiana to be aware of a potential killer that lurks in every home. That killer is FIRE, and it has struck many communities throughout the United States quickly and often without warning this winter season.

"This winter, increase your family's safety when dealing with a fire by developing and practicing a home escape plan. Remember, a home escape plan begins with the installation of smoke alarms on every level of the home," said Fire Marshal Bella.

Research suggests that more than one-third of home fires in the United States occur during the winter months of December, January, and February. These months pose a higher fire threat due to the increased use of heating sources such as chimneys and wood stoves, as well as fuel-fired and electric heaters. Fire Marshal Bella stresses the following safety tips for this winter season:

- Have an **escape plan** and practice it regularly. Make sure all family members, especially children, know how to get out of the house from several locations, and have a prearranged place for everyone to meet once they are out.
- A single **candle**, when placed near most upholstered furniture, a personal computer, newspapers, Christmas trees, stuffed toys or drapes, is more than capable of starting a fire that will destroy a home, as well as everything and everyone in it. Deaths from candle fires have more than doubled over the last decade. For a safer home:

Avoid large displays of burning candles. Never leave candles burning when you are not there to watch them. Keep burning candles out of the reach of children or pets. Keep candles away from drafts and vents. Trim wicks to ¼" prior to each use. Always use containers that have been made for use with candles. Extinguish candles before they reach the bottom of their holders, and keep matches, wick trimmings and foreign objects out of the candle wax.

MORE MORE MORE

- Do not overload **electrical outlets** or **extension cords**. Do not run extension cords under rugs or in the normal path(s) of travel.
- Keep **stairwells and exits free** of furniture or other household items.
- Have your **furnace and chimney** professionally inspected and cleaned. Chimney tar build-up can ignite your chimney, roof, and the whole house.
- Keep **cigarettes, lighters, and matches** away from children.
- **Do not try to extinguish a house fire. Get everyone out and then call your local emergency number.**
- Install **SMOKE DETECTORS** and keep them maintained. Proper maintenance includes testing monthly, battery replacement twice annually, and always keeping them clean.

AND FINALLY:

Space heaters provide supplemental heating, but it trails only cooking equipment as the leading cause of home fires (according to the NFPA). Here are some safety tips regarding space heaters:

- Space Heaters need SPACE. Keep combustibles at least three feet away from each heater.
- Turn the heater off when you leave the room, or when you sleep.
- Use space heaters only for their intended purpose.
- When buying a new unit, make sure it carries the mark of a nationally-recognized testing laboratory. Be sure that a qualified technician installs the unit or checks that the unit has been installed properly. Look for automatic shut-off features and heating element guards.
- Fuel portable kerosene heaters in a well-ventilated area away from flames or other heat sources, and only when the device has cooled completely. Use only the type of kerosene specified by the manufacturer, and never use gasoline.
- Be sure any gas-fueled heating device is installed with proper attention to ventilation, and, if unvented gas space heaters are used in bedrooms or bathrooms, they must be small and wall-mounted.
- If your electric space heater has a frayed cord or overheats, don't use it. Also avoid using extension cords with electric space heaters. If an extension cord must be used, make sure that the cord is of the right size (gauge) and type for your heater. Keep the power cord away from high traffic areas.

"Practice PREVENTION. Install smoke detectors on all levels of your home and make sure that they work," said Fire Marshal Bella. "When a fire breaks out, a working smoke alarm, functioning as an early-warning system, reduces the risk of dying by nearly 50 percent. Simply buying smoke alarms is not enough, proper installation and maintenance are vital steps of home fire safety." Fire Marshal Bella adds "If your holiday celebrations include candles, trees and lights, enjoy them safely. But be aware that the very things that bring warmth to your home also can bring tragedy if used improperly.

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